

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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DÜRER: GERMAN MASTER PRINTMAKER

An exhibition of nearly 140 prints from The Cleveland Museum of Art's exceptionally fine collection of woodcuts, engravings, and etchings by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), one of the most brilliant and influential printmakers in the history of European art, is now on view at the Museum. Although individual prints by Dürer are exhibited at the Museum periodically, not since 1971, when the Museum observed the 500th anniversary of Dürer's birth, has an exhibition provided such a comprehensive view of his graphic achievements. Dürer: German Master Printmaker, organized by Jane Glaubinger, assistant curator of prints and drawings at the Museum, remains on view through January 8, 1984.

Dürer learned the basic techniques of engraving on metal from his father, a Nuremberg goldsmith, and was afterwards apprenticed to the Nuremberg painter and woodcut designer Michael Wolgemut. He quickly developed into a virtuoso engraver and designer of woodcuts, raising these arts to a degree of refinement and expressive power that has never been surpassed. He extended the range of these basically linear processes, perfecting techniques to describe textures, model forms, and depict spatial depth. Using fine crosshatched lines and varying the intervals between parallel lines, he achieved the subtle variations of tone that are characteristic of paintings. He was also one of the first artists to use etching for printmaking.

Dürer's prints, which depict religious, allegorical, and mythological subjects, as well as scenes from daily life, reflect his many intellectual and philosophical interests. Religious themes predominate in his woodcuts; in this exhibition there is a selection of works from his four great woodcut series: the Apocalypse (based on the Book of Revelation in the New Testament), executed between 1496 and 1498; the Large Passion (1497-1510); the Small Passion (1509-1511); and the Life of the Virgin

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(1500-1511). This last series is notable for its monumental and exotic architectural settings inspired by Italian Renaissance sources.

The engravings range from small early works depicting contemporary society to the large and complex prints that are considered Dürer's masterpieces: Knight, Death, and the Devil (1513); Melencolia (1514); and St. Jerome in His Study (1514). In the latter work, Dürer produced an extraordinary range of tones to describe the bright sunlight that floods the saint's study. His handling of space in this print also demonstrates his mastery of the rules of linear perspective. The nude figures in another major engraving, Adam and Eve (1504), although inspired by classical and Italian Renaissance models, are based on Dürer's own canon of proportions for constructing the ideal human figure. The almost scientifically detailed plants and animals in this print reflect Dürer's lifelong interest in nature. Among other notable works are four of his six etchings and portrait engravings of famous contemporaries. The portraits of the humanist scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam and the Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon recall Dürer's friendships with the intellectuals and reformers of his day.

At the beginning of the exhibition, Dürer's prints are examined from the viewpoint of a connoisseur. Different impressions of the same work are juxtaposed, making it clear why some impressions are more desirable than others. Early impressions are shown to be superior since quality decreases as the fine lines of the copper plate or woodblock wear out with use.

Gallery talks in the exhibition are scheduled at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, December 7, and Sunday, December 11. A 19-minute slide-tape on Dürer's prints, prepared by Jane Glaubinger, will run continuously through January 8 in the Museum's audio-visual center (Tuesday to Saturday from 11:30 am to 4:00 pm, and Sunday from 1:30 to 4:30 pm).

Dürer: German Master Printmaker is the second of three exhibitions devoted to the works of early master printmakers. The first of these, Fifteenth-Century Prints, remains on view through November 20. The final exhibition, Rembrandt Etchings, opens January 24, 1984.